

# NIÁGARA

A PAN-AMERICAN STORY



Presented by:  
Présenté par:  
Presentado por:



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 24, 2015

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HEADSHOTS: <http://www.niagarapoem.com/headshots-june24-release.zip>

PRODUCTION ALBUM (updated regularly): <http://www.niagarapoem.com/album> (Password: niagara)

### NIÁGARA ~ A PAN-AMERICAN STORY

WORLD PREMIERE PERFORMANCES IN TORONTO JULY 23-26 DURING PANAMANIA,  
THE 2015 PAN AM/PARAPAN AM GAMES ARTS AND CULTURE FESTIVAL

*Directed by Veronica Tennant, NIÁGARA ~ A Pan-American Story  
Stars René Millán, Paula Rivera & (the voice of) Brent Carver  
Script by Guillermo Verdecchia*

**WHAT:** NIÁGARA ~ A Pan-American Story commissioned for the TORONTO 2015 arts and culture festival PANAMANIA, presented by CIBC, is inspired by PANAMANIA TO2015's theme of 'Aquaculture', celebrating the culminating year of the United Nations International Decade for Action - "Water for Life."

**WHO:** Conceived and directed by Veronica Tennant, on-stage cast features: René Millán and Paula Rivera. Brent Carver's ethereal voice will be a highlight of the soundscape.

Bios below at: <http://www.niagarapoem.com/artists.html>

Additional specially created video participation by LA COLMENITA – Cuba's outstanding children's theatre company led by Carlos Alberto Cremata.

Multi Award-winning creative team includes: Guillermo Verdecchia, Writer; Astrid Janson, Scenery and Costume Designer; John Gzowski, Composer and Sound Designer; Jock Munro, Lighting Designer; Cameron Davis, Projection Designer; Peter W. Lamb, Producer; Leslie Haller, Producer, and Peter Gentile, Producer

Bios: <http://www.niagarapoem.com/creative-team.html>

**WHEN:** July 23 – 26 July 23: 8pm; July 24 8pm; July 25 2pm & 8pm; July 26 8pm

**WHERE:** Ada Slight Hall — Daniels Spectrum | 585 DUNDAS ST. EAST, TORONTO, ON

**TICKETS:** \$38 per ticket available for purchase online:

<http://www.niagarapoem.com/tickets> and by phone 416.866.8666

*"What human voice could describe the terrifying spectacle of these roaring rapids?"*

José María Heredia, 1824

(Toronto) - NIÁGARA ~ A Pan-American Story, is inspired by the true story of a twenty-year old poet-revolutionary, who spoke out against slavery and was exiled in 1824 from his native Cuba. The internationally-renowned Veronica Tennant directs this visually stimulating and original theatre production with the stellar cast; René Millán, Paula Rivera and the voice of Brent Carver.

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**NIÁGARA ~ A Pan-American Story** engages the audience in an emotionally-charged journey to the edge of an enormous precipice on the Canadian side of Niagara Falls where José María Heredia wrote his cathartic poem which immediately immortalized him as "The First Poet of the Americas" – indeed, the father of Romantic poetry in the Spanish language.

*Niágara*, is studied and cherished to this day by every Cuban and generations of Latin Americans, who (along with the rest of the world), are compelled to visit Niagara Falls as a first stop in North America - taking on an almost cultural pilgrimage! Today, there is a plaque dedicated to Heredia on the rock-face of the Canadian side of Niagara Falls. (See attached)

*"Our piece theatrically explores the story of a man of astonishing courage,"* says Veronica Tennant, Director.  
*"Think of the rush of emotion we all feel on our first sighting of Niagara Falls. One can only imagine how dangerous and untamed it was two centuries ago. Heredia describes how he heard the roar and saw the mists from five miles away! His cathartic story with its magnitude of regret and wonderment of nature gives us a rich canvas to explore dramatically."*

**NIÁGARA ~ A Pan-American Story** is a LIVELY experience, fusing Guillermo Verdecchia's dramatic text with our stellar cast in a surreal dreamscape. José María Heredia's story will flash-back and flash-forward, in many vocabularies – exploring imagery, song and movement. Niagara Falls in Heredia's time was a gargantuan force of nature, far more wild, crashing and overpowering than today's remnants (which, even so, draw 12 million visitors a year). José María himself will come alive; he spoke of "terror and awe", and described how the very rock where he'd sat, hurtled into the chasm as he rose to leave. In the poem's last line he also predicted that he would die "in a few years", and hoped some "kind traveller" might one day look upon Niagara and think of him! The extraordinary truth is that both, came to pass! Poverty-stricken, Heredia died of tuberculosis in Mexico at the age of 35, while José María Heredia's poem *Niágara* is to this day, a seminal part of Cuban culture. This deep connection is a barely-known fact for virtually all Canadians.

What more apt time or place for these discoveries to be blazoned in an imaginative artistic experience - than during the Pan-American Games - Arts and Culture program, PANAMANIA in Toronto, July 2015?

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## ARTIST BIOS



**VERONICA TENNANT**  
**DIRECTOR**

Headshots: <http://www.niagarapoem.com/headshots-june24-release.zip>

Veronica Tennant, in her first career as Prima Ballerina with The National Ballet of Canada, won hearts and accolades on the national and international ballet stage. Now recognized as a collaborative and innovative auteur filmmaker, director/producer, her works have garnered numerous awards, including the International Emmy Award. She has been appointed to the Order of Canada and holds the rank of Companion, which is the country's highest honour.

Impassioned to expand horizons, Veronica's affinity with Cuban artists began with her meeting an icon of Cuban culture, Liza Alfonso in 2006, who became the subject of her award-winning performance documentary; *Vida y Danza, Cuba!* Telecast in Canada on Bravo! – and on Cuban National Television and screened at the Havana Film Festival, the film also garnered Gemini Nominations for Best Director and Best Performing Arts Program, as well as being presented at the Luminato Festival of Creativity in Toronto. She has developed many artistic projects since; with several prominent and emerging Cuban artists of all disciplines including Carlos Alberto Cremata and his brilliant young people's theatre company, La Colmenita. The seed of inspiration for ***NIÁGARA ~ A Pan-American Story*** was meeting Keith Ellis in 2010 and receiving his book on the seminal ode written to Niagara Falls by José María Heredia in 1824.

Veronica Tennant's film *Shadow Pleasures*, telecast on CBC Television, brought together a splendid collaboration of artists. Written and narrated by Michael Ondaatje, it received an unprecedented sweep at the Yorkton Film Festival with 7 Golden Sheaf Awards, including Best of the Festival, Best Performing Arts for Producer Peter Gentile, and the Norman Jewison Best Director Award for Tennant. John Gzowski was awarded his Golden Sheaf for original score and Astrid Janson production designer, won a Gemini Award.

Theatrical collaborations include: movement director/choreographer, for the theatrical adaptation of Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*, a collaboration between the Royal Shakespearean Company and NAC; *The Piano Man's Daughter* with Timothy Findley, artists' collaborative, director Paul Thompson (National tour, 22 cities); associate director and choreographer at Tarragon, Shaw Festival Canadian Stage, and the Stratford Festival.

Throughout all her careers, Veronica Tennant has been driven by her passion: to catalyze artistic collaborations and to encourage and involve young emerging talent. Her honours include: Inductee, Canada's Walk of Fame, Canada Council's Walter Carse Prize for Excellence in the Performing Arts, The Governor General's Performing Arts Award for Lifetime Achievement, and honorary doctorates from the Universities of Brock, York, Simon Fraser, Toronto, and McGill. Veronica Tennant was the first dancer to be appointed to the Order of Canada as Officer in 1975. In 2003, she was elevated to the rank of Companion. She has served as a UNICEF Canada Ambassador since 1995.

Website: <http://www.veronicatennant.com>

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**RENÉ MILLÁN**  
**JOSÉ MARÍA HEREDIA**

Headshots: <http://www.niagarapoem.com/headshots-june24-release.zip>

The youngest of five brothers and son of Mexican immigrants, René Millán was first introduced to the world of theatre by his father, who was a former singer for the San Diego Opera. Despite being very shy as a young man, René began his acting career at the age of 17 in his hometown of San Diego, California.

After graduation from The University of San Diego High School, René began studying education and world history at University of Redlands in San Bernardino, California. During his undergraduate years, he began taking voice lessons and participating in university plays, musicals and operas.

Following his studies at University of Redlands, René began graduate school with the esteemed professional actor training program at University of Washington. During his graduate studies, René was introduced to the Suzuki Method of acting. The Suzuki Method immediately struck him as a completely unique method of transforming kinesthetic learning into effective modes of expression. René credits Suzuki Method with helping him find his voice as an actor, finding a sense of fearlessness in front of the camera and on stage and empowering him to overcome his naturally introverted tendencies and connect with the audience to create a powerful experience for both actor and audience.

Since graduating from University of Washington with an MFA, René made his Broadway debut in *The Wild Party* directed by George C. Wolfe. René spent the next nine years working and living as an actor in New York City, contributing to and acting in various theatre, film and television projects. René founded Millán Studio and began coaching and teaching actors in both group and individual settings in 1999.

After leaving New York City, René spent the next seven years as a well-known member of the acting company at the Tony Award-winning Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland, Oregon. There, he originated the role of Juan José in the world premiere of *American Night: The Ballad of Juan José* by Richard Montoya and *Culture Clash*, directed by Jo Bonney. He also played the role of Juan José in productions at La Jolla Playhouse, Kirk Douglas Theater, and Yale Repertory Theatre. René continued teaching with Millán Studio and also as a teaching artist with the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Ashland High School and Seattle University.

In 2012, René was awarded the Beinecke Visiting Scholar Fellowship from Yale University. At Yale University, René starred in *American Night: The Ballad of Juan Jose* and taught physical actor training workshops based on the Suzuki Method in Yale's graduate-level acting program, a program that trained well-known actors such as Meryl Streep, Paul Giamatti, and Lupita Nyong'o. René now lives and teaches in Nashville, Tennessee with his two beautiful children.

Website: <http://www.renemillan.com>



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**PAULA RIVERA**  
JACOBA/MERCED/ISABEL

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Mexico City native Paula Rivera has made Toronto her home for over a decade. She first engaged her curiosity in the performing arts through dance – training in Classical Ballet as a child as well as Modern Dance. She was introduced into the world of acting once living in Canada, a world that has felt like home ever since. She has acted for film, television and theatre. She most recently starred in Jerry Ciccoritti's film *The Resurrection of Tony Gitone*, as well as guest-starring in his television Movies, *Holidazed*, *The Terrorist Next Door* and *Victor, the Victor Davis Story*. Other credits include starring alongside Brent Butt in his sitcom *Hiccups* as well as guest appearances in popular shows like *Flashpoint* and *Bloodletting and Miraculous Cures*. For theatre, she most recently participated with Pro Arte Danza playing Federico Fellini's wife Giulietta Massina in *Flying: a Fellini Cabaret*, as part of the Souleppper Cabaret Series, in the world premiere of Carmen Aguirre's *The Refugee Hotel* and in Judith Thompson's *Lion in the Streets*. Ms Rivera wrote and performed the One-woman show *Every Girl Wants a Skirt Like Frida's*, a story that explores in a sweet and sour manner the discoveries of someone immigrating to a new country. The show premiered at The Toronto Fringe Festival to great success and later was turned into a BravoFact short.

Ms Rivera is truly honored to be part of **NIÁGARA ~ A Pan-American Story**, to work with Veronica Tennant, Guillermo Verdecchia, René Millán, and the rest of the team in such a beautiful project that marks a special moment for the City of Toronto.



**BRENT CARVER**  
VOCALIST

Headshots: <http://www.niagarapoem.com/headshots-june24-release.zip>

One of Canada's most versatile performance artists, Tony-Award-winning Brent Carver, is acclaimed for the sensitivity, emotional honesty and charisma he brings to every role, from Shakespeare classics to new Canadian works, and from intimate cabaret performances to blockbuster musicals. In a career spanning over 40 years he has dazzled audiences and critics across Canada, the United States and the UK. Brent most recently mesmerized audiences in GLENN by David Young as the purist, Glenn Gould. His selected stage credits include, in Toronto: *Don Carlos* (inaugural season, Souleppper); *High Life* (Crow's Theatre); *Tartuffe*, *The Story of My Life*, *Vigil*, *Larry's Party*, *The Elephant Man* (Canadian Stage); And elsewhere: *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *Richard III* (The Citadel, Edmonton); *Comedians* (Arts Club, Vancouver); *Man of La Mancha* (Neptune Theatre, Halifax); *As You Like It*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Elizabeth Rex*, *Hamlet*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Foxfire*, *The Pirates of Penzance*, *Long Day's Journey Into Night*

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(Stratford); *My Life with Albertine* (Playwrights Horizons, New York); *The Tempest* (Mark Taper Forum, Los Angeles); and on Broadway, *Romeo and Juliet*, *King Lear*, *Parade*, *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (Toronto, London and New York). His celebrated cabaret show, *Brent Carver in Concert*, sold out at Soulpepper's 2013 Winter at the Young series and he is a founding artist of Toronto's Theatre 20. Film and TV appearances include *Lilies*, *The Tale of Teeka*, *Ararat*, *The Event*, *Deeply*, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, *Elizabeth Rex*, *Young at Heart*, *Twice in a Lifetime*, and *The Wars*.

Brent Carver's awards and honours include a Tony Award, Toronto Arts Award, two New York Drama Desk Awards, Theatre World Award (New York), four Dora Mavor Moore Awards, two Genie and four Gemini Awards, ACTRA Toronto Award, Sterling Award (Edmonton), and City of Cranbrook Award. In May 2014, Brent Carver received a Governor General's Performing Arts Award, Canada's highest honour in the performing arts, for his lifetime contribution to Canadian theatre.

## JOSÉ MARÍA HEREDIA HONORARY PLAQUE, NIAGARA FALLS, CANADA

